Assassination Panel Cuts Budget Request in Half

House Is Expected to Vote Next Week on Continuation of Kennedy, King Slaying Probes

BY NORMAN KEMPSTER
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WASHINGTON—Hoping to convince other House members that it has brought its controversial spending plans under control, the House Assassinations Committee Wednesday unanimously requested a $2,796,650 budget—less than half of what it once called a "bare bones" figure.

The full House is expected to decide sometime next week whether it will permit the panel to continue beyond March 31 in its investigation of the killings of President John F. Kennedy and civil rights leader Martin Luther King.

Shortly after it approved its revised budget, the committee formally asked the House to lift the March 31 expiration date, imposed last month because of a controversy over the panel's then-proposed $6.5 million budget and its planned use of controversial investigative techniques. The committee earlier voted to place severe restrictions on the use of lie detectors and other devices.

Chief counsel Richard A. Sprague, who argued earlier that the committee could not do a thorough job if the House cut even a dollar from the original $6.5 million budget request, said Wednesday that the investigation could be conducted with less money "but it will take longer." He said it would take at least until the end of 1978 to complete the probe.

At the spending level sought by the committee, a two-year investigation would cost about $6 million.

After the meeting, Chairman Louis Stokes (D-Ohio) told reporters that Sprague would go to Brushy Mountain State Prison in Tennessee next Monday for a second interview with James Earl Ray, who pleaded guilty to assassinating King but has since claimed he was not the killer.

Sprague questioned Ray at the prison for two hours on Tuesday. The chief counsel reported the details of the interview to the committee during a closed-door session Wednesday. Stokes declined to discuss the substance of Sprague's report but other committee sources said Ray provided no new information while repeating his claim that the killer was a mysterious Latin he knew only as "Raoul." Ray was not placed under oath for Sprague's questioning.

Stokes said the purpose of the questioning was "merely to establish a relationship with him and to begin the interview . . . it may be

Do you think Carl Ogelsby's book "The Yankee & Cowboy war" has any merit? It was interesting — there was more on the Dorothy Hunt plane [illegible]

Does Jerry Ray still keep in touch with you? Best, Paul

necessary to talk to him many times."

Meanwhile there were these developments:

—The committee staff received a copy of an FBI report, dated the day after Kennedy was assassinated, that could help support a theory that someone impersonated Lee Harvey Oswald about six weeks before the murder. The Warren Commission determined that Oswald was the lone assassin in the Kennedy slaying.

—The wife of a retired Louisville, Ky., police officer confirmed that her husband told Rep. Gene Snyder (R-Ky.) that he was offered $500,000 on two occasions to kill King, the Associated Press reported from Louisville. Mary Baird said that her husband, Clifton, said the offer was made by other policemen and several FBI agents. Clifton Baird, 50, was reported by his wife to be out of town and unavailable for comment.

The FBI report, which was forwarded by former Director J. Edgar Hoover to the Secret Service on Nov. 23, 1963, but apparently never was given to the Warren Commission, adds a few details—and raises a few additional questions—about contacts between the Soviet Embassy in Mexico City and someone who identified himself as Oswald in early October, 1963.

The report said: "The Central Intelligence Agency advised that on Oct. 1, 1963, an extremely sensitive source had reported that an individual (who) identified himself as Lee Oswald contacted the Soviet Embassy in Mexico City inquiring as to any messages. Special agents of this Bureau, who have conversed with Oswald in Dallas, Tex., have observed photographs of the individual referred to above and have listened to a recording of his voice. These special agents are of the opinion that the above-referred-to individual was not Lee Harvey Oswald."

The report indicates that someone other than Oswald "identified himself as Lee Oswald" at the embassy and was secretly tape-recorded while doing so. Some Warren Commission critics have claimed for years that unknown conspirators "set up" Oswald to take the blame for the assassination, in part by impersonating him in incriminating situations.

The FBI report was turned over to attorney Mark Lane, a longtime commission critic, by the Secret Service under the Freedom of Information Act.